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DOCTOR STRANGE®

GIVE UP, STRANGE! IF I DON'T GET YOU, MY GARGOYLES WILL!

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Once he was a man like most *others*— a *worldly* man, seduced and jaded by *material* things. But then he discovered the *separate* reality, where *sorcery* and *men's souls* shaped the forces that shape our *lives*. In that instant, he was *born again*, to become a man like no other!

Stan Lee Presents: Dr. STRANGE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

CHRIS CLAREMONT / WRITER | GENE COLAN / PENCILLER | DAN GREEN / INKER | JIM NOVAK, LETTERER / BOB SHAREN, COLORIST | JO DUFFY / EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

DUEL OF FIRE!

IN ANOTHER DIMENSION, ON AN EARTH SIMILAR TO -- YET FAR REMOVED FROM -- OUR OWN...

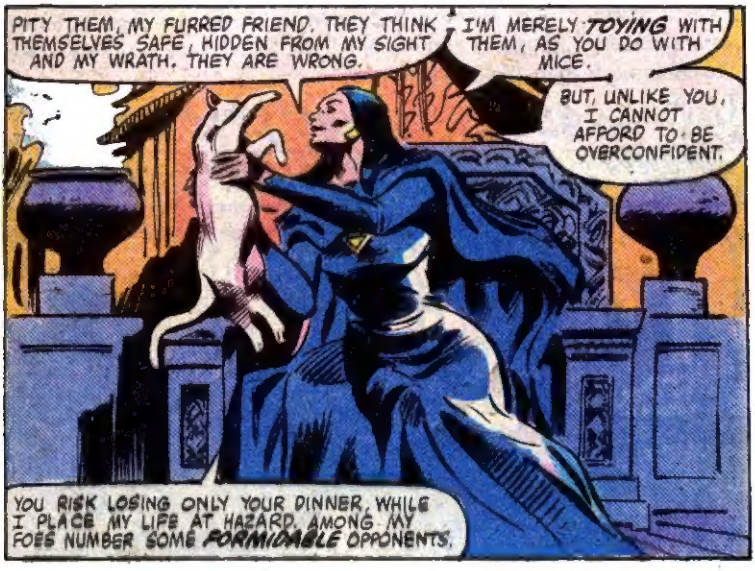
...THE **SHADOWQUEEN** SITS ON HER OBSIDIAN THRONE, WATCHING HER ENEMIES IN HER MYSTIC **VIEWING CRYSTAL**: SHE PLOTS THEIR DESTRUCTION, AS THEY PLOT **HERS**.

PRRRUP..?

HER NAME IS **SHIALMAR**, AND IN THE THOUSAND YEARS SHE HAS RULED THIS WORLD SHE HAS NEVER BEEN CHALLENGED. TONIGHT, THAT HAS CHANGED AND BEFORE SHE SEES ANOTHER SUNRISE, SHE KNOWS SHE WILL EITHER BE VICTORIOUS, OR DEAD.

SHE DOES NOT FEAR THE COMING BATTLE. QUITE THE CONTRARY, SHE **WELCOMES** IT.

DOCTOR STRANGE™ Vol. 1, No 44, December, 1980 issue. (U.S.P.S. 426-910) Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP. James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 575 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022. SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, N.Y. AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. Published bi-monthly. Copyright © 1980 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price 50¢ per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate $6.00 for 12 issues. Canada, $7.00. Foreign, $8.00. Printed in the U.S.A. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. DOCTOR STRANGE (including all prominent characters featured in the issue), and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of the MARVEL COMICS GROUP.


PITY THEM, MY FURRED FRIEND. THEY THINK THEMSELVES SAFE, HIDDEN FROM MY SIGHT AND MY WRATH. THEY ARE WRONG.
I'M MERELY TOYING WITH THEM, AS YOU DO WITH MICE.
BUT, UNLIKE YOU, I CANNOT AFFORD TO BE OVERCONFIDENT.
YOU RISK LOSING ONLY YOUR DINNER, WHILE I PLACE MY LIFE AT HAZARD, AMONG MY FOES NUMBER SOME FORMIDABLE OPPONENTS.

WONG, DESCENDANT OF THE MAN I ... LOVED. THOUGH SKILLED AS A HEALER, HE HAS NO MYSTIC ABILITY. HE IS A SIMPLE SERVANT.
I HAD MY AGENTS KIDNAP HIM SO THAT HE COULD LEAD ME TO MY ARCH-ENEMY...

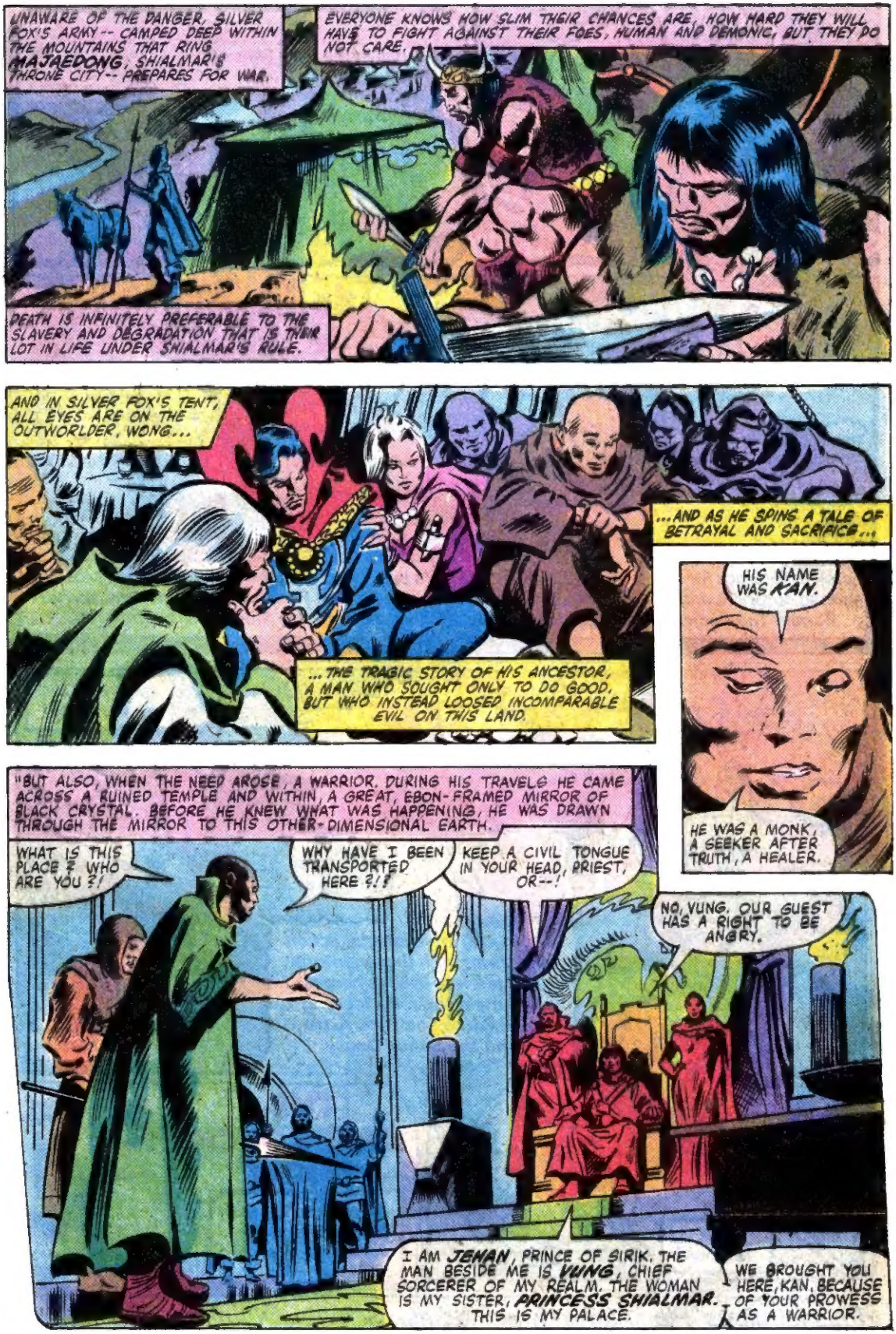
"...SAYAN--CALLED SILVER FOX--LAST DESCENDANT OF THE WIZARD KINGS WHO RULED THIS WORLD BEFORE ME. HE IS A WARRIOR WITHOUT PEER...
"... AND HAS POWER OVER THE NATURAL ELEMENTS: EARTH, AIR, FIRE, AND WATER. REGRETTABLY, MY AGENTS BUNGLED THEIR MISSION.

"THEY CAPTURED NOT ONLY WONG, BUT A MINOR ALIEN SORCERESS NAMED CLEA--DISCIPLE AND LOVER OF...

"... DR. STEPHEN STRANGE, MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS AND SORCERER SUPREME OF HIS EARTH, THE MAN WONG SERVES.
"HE FOLLOWED CLEA'S TRAIL, AS SHE HAD FOLLOWED WONG'S...

...AND HAS SINCE ALLIED HIMSELF WITH SILVER FOX.* NOW THEY LISTEN TO WONG'S TALE OF HOW HIS ANCESTOR CAME HERE AND OVERTHREW THE WIZARD-KINGS, HOPING THEREBY TO FIND A WAY TO DESTROY ME.
THEY HOPE IN VAIN
LOOK TO YOUR LIVES, FOOLS--LOOK TO YOUR SOULS! BEFORE I'M DONE WITH YOU, DEATH WILL SEEM LIKE A MERCIFUL FATE!
*SEE THE LAST TWO ISSUES FOR MORE DETAILS--JO.

WITH THAT, THE SHADOWQUEEN LAUGHS...
...AND--HER BLACK-JADE EYES ALIGHT WITH AN UNHOLY PASSION--DISAPPEARS.


UNAWARE OF THE DANGER, SILVER FOX'S ARMY -- CAMPED DEEP WITHIN THE MOUNTAINS THAT RING MAJAEDONG, SHIALMAR'S THRONE CITY -- PREPARES FOR WAR.
EVERYONE KNOWS HOW SLIM THEIR CHANCES ARE, HOW HARD THEY WILL HAVE TO FIGHT AGAINST THEIR FOES, HUMAN AND DEMONIC, BUT THEY DO NOT CARE.
DEATH IS INFINITELY PREFERABLE TO THE SLAVERY AND DEGRADATION THAT IS THEIR LOT IN LIFE UNDER SHIALMAR'S RULE.
AND IN SILVER FOX'S TENT, ALL EYES ARE ON THE OUTWORLDER, WONG...
...AND AS HE SPINS A TALE OF BETRAYAL AND SACRIFICE...
...THE TRAGIC STORY OF HIS ANCESTOR, A MAN WHO SOUGHT ONLY TO DO GOOD, BUT WHO INSTEAD LOOSED INCOMPARABLE EVIL ON THIS LAND.
HIS NAME WAS KAN.
HE WAS A MONK, A SEEKER AFTER TRUTH, A HEALER.
"BUT ALSO, WHEN THE NEED AROSE, A WARRIOR. DURING HIS TRAVELS HE CAME ACROSS A RUINED TEMPLE AND WITHIN, A GREAT, EBON-FRAMED MIRROR OF BLACK CRYSTAL. BEFORE HE KNEW WHAT WAS HAPPENING, HE WAS DRAWN THROUGH THE MIRROR TO THIS OTHER-DIMENSIONAL EARTH.
WHAT IS THIS PLACE? WHO ARE YOU?!
WHY HAVE I BEEN TRANSPORTED HERE?!?
KEEP A CIVIL TONGUE IN YOUR HEAD, PRIEST, OR--!
NO, VUNG. OUR GUEST HAS A RIGHT TO BE ANGRY.
I AM JENAN, PRINCE OF SIRIK. THE MAN BESIDE ME IS VUNG, CHIEF SORCERER OF MY REALM. THE WOMAN IS MY SISTER, PRINCESS SHIALMAR. THIS IS MY PALACE.
WE BROUGHT YOU HERE, KAN, BECAUSE OF YOUR PROWESS AS A WARRIOR.

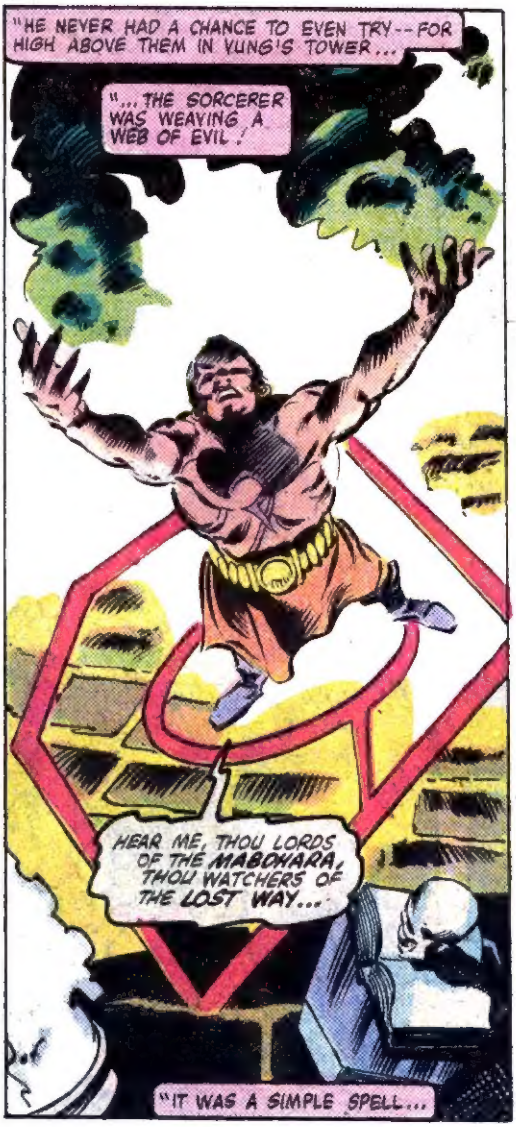
SIRIK STANDS FIRST AMONG THE YOUNG KINGDOMS, A CONFEDERATION OF HUMAN STATES UNITED AGAINST THE OPPRESSION OF THE WIZARD KINGS--NON-HUMAN TYRANTS WHO'VE RULED THIS WORLD SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME.
BUT NOW, THE DAY HAS COME FOR THE YOUNG KINGDOMS TO RULE THEMSELVES!
NOW IS THE TIME FOR HUMANITY TO BE FREE!
"APPLAUSE AND CHEERS THUNDERED THROUGH THE ROOM.
"JEHAN'S PROUD SPEECH HAD FIRED THE BLOOD OF EVERYONE PRESENT. THEY WERE READY TO MARCH TO WAR ON THE SPOT.
"BUT MY ANCESTOR HAD SEEN WAR...
"...AND ABHORRED IT. HE WOULD DO ANYTHING TO PREVENT SUCH A HORROR.
YOU STILL HAVE NOT SAID WHY I AM HERE.
BECAUSE, PRIEST, ALTHOUGH JEHAN IS BRAVE AND INTELLIGENT, SUPREMELY SCHOOLED IN THE ARTS OF STATECRAFT, HE KNOWS LITTLE OF THOSE OF WAR. HE LACKS YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE.
I CAST A SPELL ACROSS THE COUNTLESS DIMENSIONS TO BRING ME A WARRIOR-SUPREME TO LEAD US IN OUR STRUGGLE.
THAT WARRIOR, KAN, IS YOU.
SOMETHING ABOUT VUNG MAKES ME... UNEASY. I DO NOT TRUST HIM.
IT SEEMS TO ME, PRINCE JEHAN, THAT IF YOURS IS A WORLD OF PEACE--AS I INFER FROM YOUR SORCERER'S WORDS--THEN THE RULE OF THESE WIZARD KINGS CANNOT BE ALL THAT BAD.
THEIR PEACE IS THE PEACE OF ETERNAL SLAVERY! WE MUST-- WE WILL-- BE FREE TO FORGE OUR OWN DESTINY, NOT BE FOREVER CODDLED LIKE INFANTS IN SWADDLING CLOTHES!
THE HAND OF DESTINY HAS CHOSEN YOU TO LEAD US, KAN!
WILL YOU REFUSE SUCH A CHALLENGE?!

"LATER...
WE'VE BEEN TALKING ALL DAY, KAN, YET YOU'RE STILL NOT CONVINCED.
YOU'RE AN ELOQUENT SPOKESWOMAN FOR YOUR BROTHER'S CAUSE, SHIALMAR.
AND ONE WHOSE BEAUTY, AND GRACE OF SPIRIT, TOUCH ME TO MY SOUL.

BUT JEHAN DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HE'S TALKING ABOUT. HE THINKS WAR IS EXCITING AND NOBLE -- AN ADVENTURE.

IT IS NOT.
PERHAPS IT IS NOT YET TOO LATE.
PERHAPS A SETTLEMENT CAN BE NEGOTIATED BETWEEN YOU AND THE WIZARD KINGS.

"MY ANCESTOR SAW JEHAN FOR WHAT HE TRULY WAS: A MAN WHO LOOKED THE PART OF A STORY-BOOK PRINCE...
"...BUT LACKED THE ABILITY TO COPE WITH THE JOB. SHIALMAR, HE THOUGHT, WOULD HAVE MADE A FAR BETTER RULER. IN LESS THAN A DAY, HE'D FALLEN IN LOVE WITH HER, AND SHE WITH HIM. THROUGH HER, HE NOW HOPED TO PERSUADE JEHAN TO ABANDON HIS FOLLY.

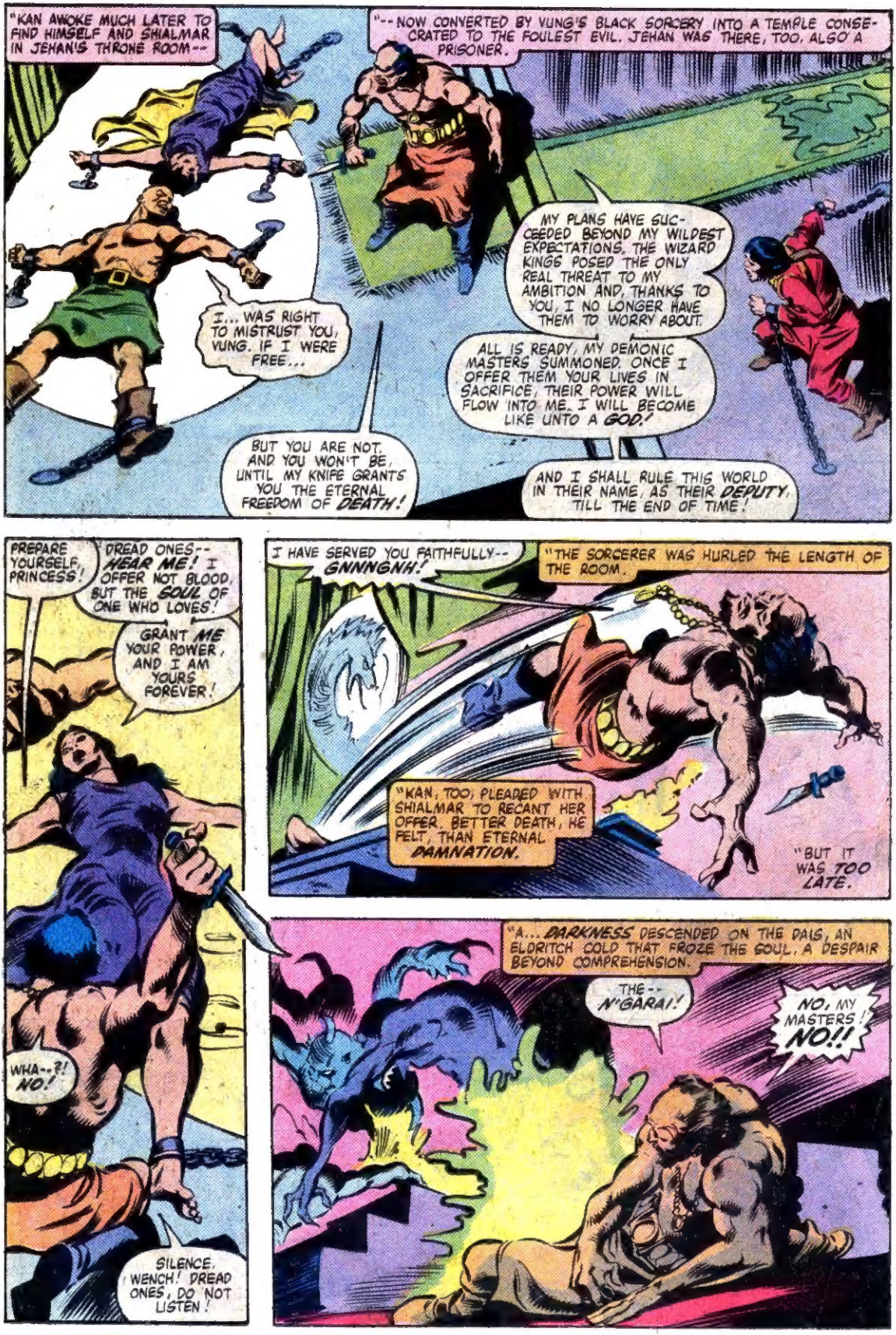

"HE NEVER HAD A CHANCE TO EVEN TRY -- FOR HIGH ABOVE THEM IN VUNG'S TOWER...
"...THE SORCERER WAS WEAVING A WEB OF EVIL.
HEAR ME, THOU LORDS OF THE MABDHARA, THOU WATCHERS OF THE LOST WAY...
"IT WAS A SIMPLE SPELL...

SSSRRRRR
"...AND A SIMPLE TASK VUNG WISHED THE DEMON HE'D CONJURED TO PERFORM.

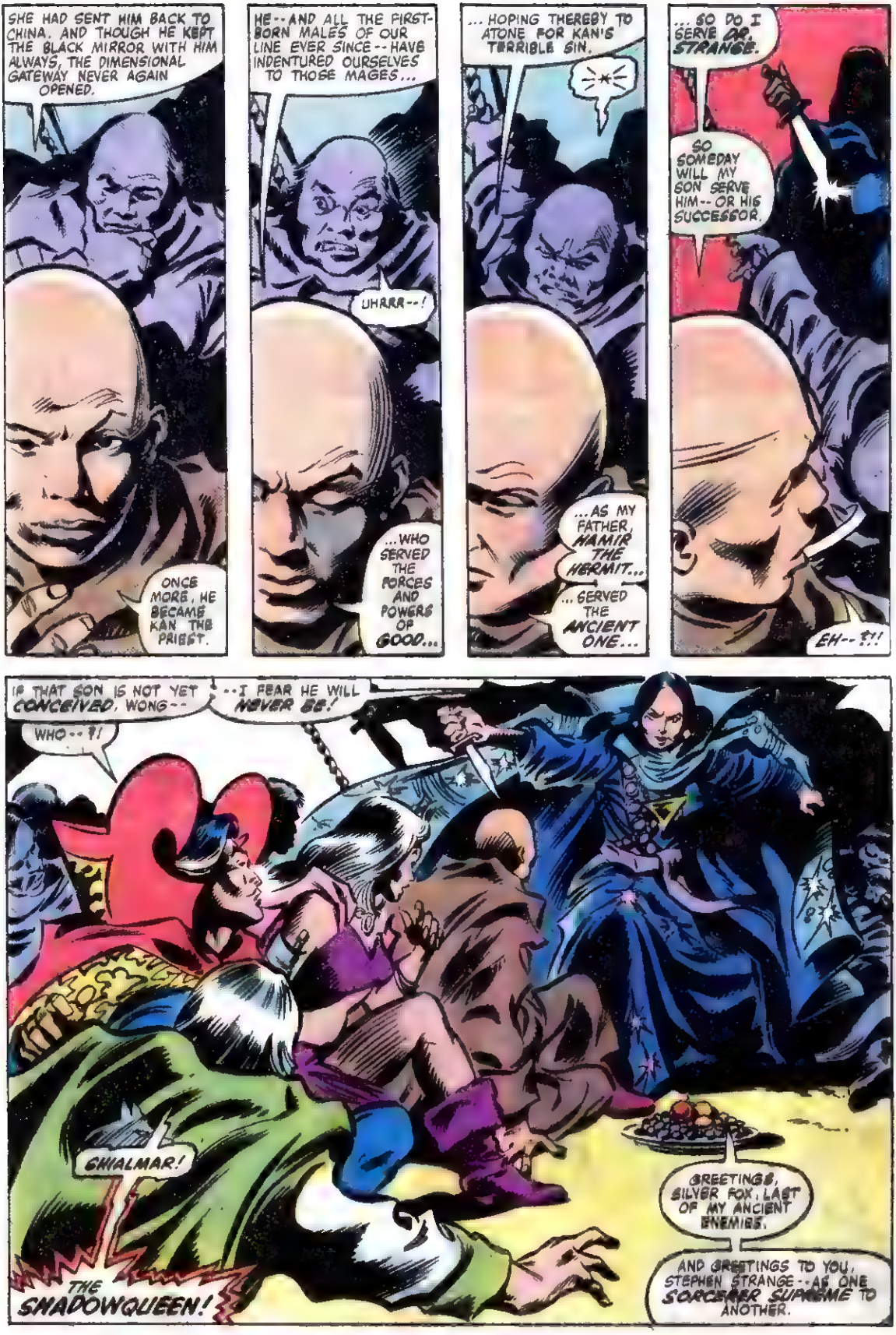
A MAN AND A WOMAN WALK THE PARAPET BELOW.
KILL THEM!
"THIS WAS A TEST OF SORTS. IF KAN WAS INDEED A WARRIOR-SUPREME, HE WOULD EASILY DEFEAT THE DEMON. IF NOT, HE AND SHIALMAR WOULD DIE -- HER DEATH REMOVING VUNG'S ONLY RIVAL FOR JEHAN'S ATTENTION -- AND VUNG WOULD BEGIN A SEARCH FOR A NEW CHAMPION!
SO STRANGE -- TO KNOW SOMEONE FOR SO SHORT A TIME...
...YET CARE FOR HIM, SO MUCH!
I FEEL THE SAME, PRINCESS. EXCITED, YET AWED BY THE EMOTIONS YOU STIR WITHIN ME -- EH?!
THAT SHADOW -- BLOTTING OUT THE SUN.
BLOOD OF MY ANCESTORS!
A KYRII!
THE MONSTER SERVES THE WIZARD KINGS!
IT SLEW MY PARENTS AT THEIR BIDDING! NOW IT SEEKS MY DEATH!
KAN, HELP ME! HELP ME!!
:UNNNGNH!:
WING -- HIT LIKE A BATTERING RAM, KNOCKED... WIND OUT OF ME.
NO! THE DEMON'S FLYING AWAY WITH SHIALMAR! I CAN'T CATCH HIM -- STILL TOO GROGGY --
--I'LL HAVE TO USE MY SHURIKEN!

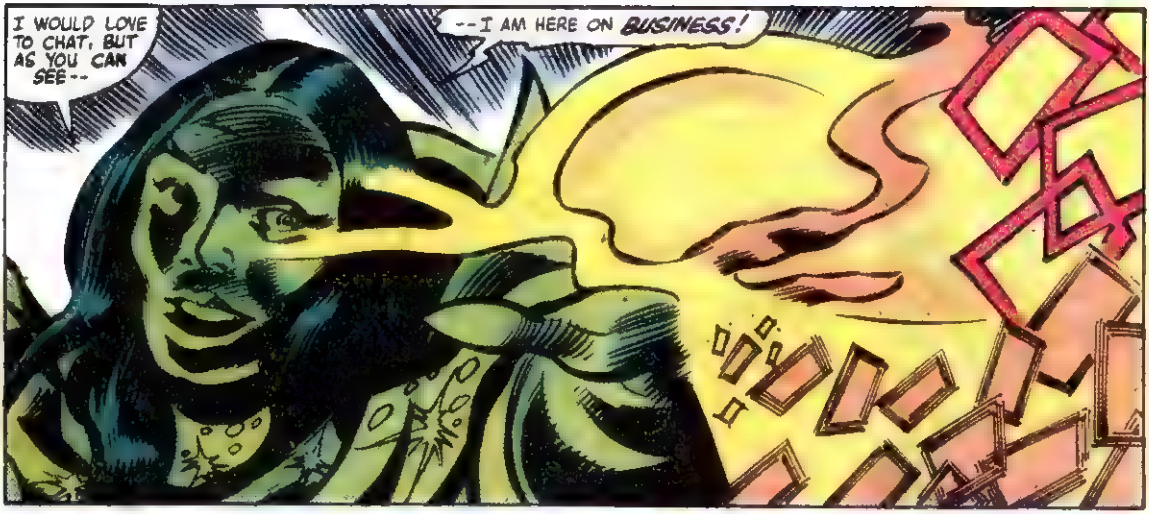
THESE THROWING STARS ARE EDGED IN SACRED SILVER. IF ANY WEAPON I POSSESS IS EFFECTIVE AGAINST SUCH A SPAWN OF EVIL...
...IT IS THEY!
"HIS ARM WAS STRONG...
"...HIS AIM SURE.
THE DEMON-- DISSOLVING!
GODS HELP ME-- I'M FALLING!
RELAX YOUR BODY, SHIALMAR! I'LL CATCH YOU!
KAN!
OH, THE GODS BE PRAISED!
YOU SAID THAT THING WAS SENT BY THE WIZARD KINGS TO SLAUGHTER YOUR PARENTS?
SO VUNG TOLD US.
NEVER HAVE I FELT SUCH FUNDAMENTAL EVIL.
THOSE WHO DEAL WITH SUCH A CREATURE...
...CANNOT BE REASONED WITH, MY DEAR ONE. ONLY EXPUNGED LIKE VERMIN.
I WILL LEAD YOUR ARMY.
"AND IN HIS SANCTUM SANCTORUM, VUNG THE SORCERER--VUNG THE LIAR-- HEARD KAN'S EVERY WORD --AND LAUGHED IN TRIUMPH.
"KAN TRAINED THE MIGHTIEST HOST THIS WORLD HAD EVER SEEN, AND LED IT OFF TO WAR.
"HE WAS EVER IN THE THICK OF BATTLE, WITH JEHAN AND SHIALMAR BY HIS SIDE.
"JEHAN SEEMED TO THRIVE ON THE CARNAGE. IT MADE SHIALMAR WEEP, AND KAN AS WELL-- THOUGH HE WAS ITS ARCHITECT. OFTEN, THE PRIEST AND THE PRINCESS SOUGHT SOLACE, AND ESCAPE, IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS.

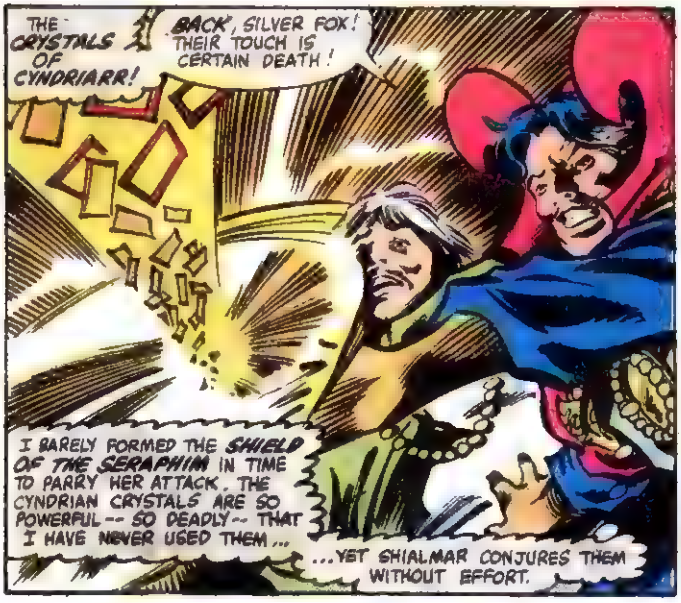
"FINALLY, THE WAR CAME TO MAJAEDONG, THE FABLED CITY OF LIGHT, ANCESTRAL HOME OF THE WIZARD KINGS-- SIGHT OF THEIR LAST STAND.
"KAN OFFERED THEM A CHANCE TO SURRENDER. THEY REFUSED. AND SO THE MASSACRE BEGAN.
"WHEN IT WAS OVER, THE CITY BURNED, THE FLAMES STRETCHING THE LENGTH OF THE HORIZON AND REACHING OVER A MILE INTO THE SKY.
WHAT HAVE I DONE?
OH, GREAT GODS FORGIVE ME -- WHAT HAVE I DONE?! IS ANY CAUSE WORTH SUCH DESTRUCTION? DOES ANY FOE -- NO MATTER HOW EVIL -- DESERVE THIS END?
KAN?
HOW GOES IT WITH YOU, MY LOVE?
I AM WELL, DEAREST, AND YOU?
HEARTSICK. THAT A MAN SWORN TO THE WAYS OF PEACE COULD CREATE... THIS.
THEY DIED WITHOUT A SOUND.
MEN, WOMEN, CHILDREN -- EVEN BABIES -- UNDER SWORD OR LANCE OR... FIRE. THEY MADE NO OUTCRY. I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH COURAGE.
HAIL, VUNG.
YOU LOOK CHEERFUL.
AND WHY SHOULDN'T I? THANKS TO YOU, WARLORD KAN, I'M ABOUT TO ACHIEVE ULTIMATE VICTORY!
AS YOU EXTERMINATED THE WIZARD KINGS -- THE TRULY BENEFICENT MASTERS OF THIS PLACE--
--SO SHALL I NOW DESTROY YOU--
MY LOVE--BEWAARRRGH!!
--IN THE NAME OF MY DREAD, DEMONIC MASTERS: THE N'GARAI!!


"KAN AWOKE MUCH LATER TO FIND HIMSELF AND SHIALMAR IN JEHAN'S THRONE ROOM--
"--NOW CONVERTED BY VUNG'S BLACK SORCERY INTO A TEMPLE CONSECRATED TO THE FOULEST EVIL. JEHAN WAS THERE, TOO, ALSO A PRISONER.
I... WAS RIGHT TO MISTRUST YOU, VUNG. IF I WERE FREE...
MY PLANS HAVE SUCCEEDED BEYOND MY WILDEST EXPECTATIONS. THE WIZARD KINGS POSED THE ONLY REAL THREAT TO MY AMBITION AND, THANKS TO YOU, I NO LONGER HAVE THEM TO WORRY ABOUT.
ALL IS READY, MY DEMONIC MASTERS SUMMONED. ONCE I OFFER THEM YOUR LIVES IN SACRIFICE, THEIR POWER WILL FLOW INTO ME. I WILL BECOME LIKE UNTO A GOD!
BUT YOU ARE NOT. AND YOU WON'T BE, UNTIL MY KNIFE GRANTS YOU THE ETERNAL FREEDOM OF DEATH!
AND I SHALL RULE THIS WORLD IN THEIR NAME, AS THEIR DEPUTY, TILL THE END OF TIME!
PREPARE YOURSELF, PRINCESS!
DREAD ONES-- HEAR ME! I OFFER NOT BLOOD, BUT THE SOUL OF ONE WHO LOVES!
GRANT ME YOUR POWER, AND I AM YOURS FOREVER!
WHA--?! NO!
SILENCE, WENCH! DREAD ONES, DO NOT LISTEN!
I HAVE SERVED YOU FAITHFULLY-- GNNNGNH!
"THE SORCERER WAS HURLED THE LENGTH OF THE ROOM.
"KAN, TOO, PLEADED WITH SHIALMAR TO RECANT HER OFFER. BETTER DEATH, HE FELT, THAN ETERNAL DAMNATION.
"BUT IT WAS TOO LATE.
"A... DARKNESS DESCENDED ON THE DAIS, AN ELDRITCH COLD THAT FROZE THE SOUL. A DESPAIR BEYOND COMPREHENSION.
THE-- N'GARAI!
NO, MY MASTERS! NO!!

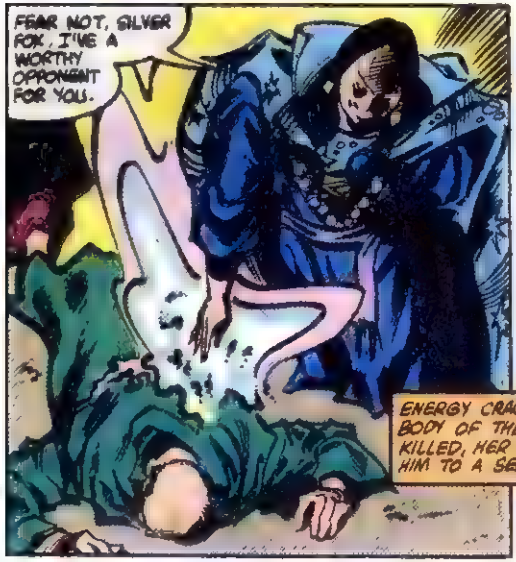
"AND WHEN IT LIFTED...
"... THE PRINCESS SHIALMAR...
"... HAD METAMORPHOSED INTO THE SHADOWQUEEN.
"VUNG, HOWEVER, WAS NOT PREPARED TO RELINQUISH HIS POWER -- A POWER HE FELT WAS RIGHTFULLY HIS -- WITHOUT A FIGHT. HE STRUCK WITH ALL HIS SORCEROUS MIGHT.
"HE DID NOT LIVE TO STRIKE A SECOND TIME.
AAHHH!
IS IT MY TURN NOW?
I AM GIVEN A CHOICE.
THE N'GARAI DEMAND THE LIFE --AND SOUL -- OF ONE I LOVE.
WHAT'S SURPRISING IS THAT MY CHOICE TURNS OUT TO BE NO CHOICE AT ALL.
I AM SORRY, MY BROTHER.
NO, OH, NO!
WOULD I WERE BLIND BEFORE I SAW THIS SIGHT!
WHY, SHIALMAR? BY ALL THAT'S HOLY-- WHY?!!
FOR AN EMOTION I NO LONGER FEEL, AND NEVER WILL AGAIN!
POOF!
I LOVED YOU. I WOULD NOT SEE YOU HURT. AT ANY COST!
FAREWELL, KAN
SHIALMAR-- NO!!
DON'T SEND ME AWAY! LET ME HELP YOU! SHIALMAR, PLEASE--!
"HE WEPT AND CURSED AND PLEADED AS THE IMAGE IN THE MIRROR FADED, BUT HIS PLEAS WENT UNANSWERED.

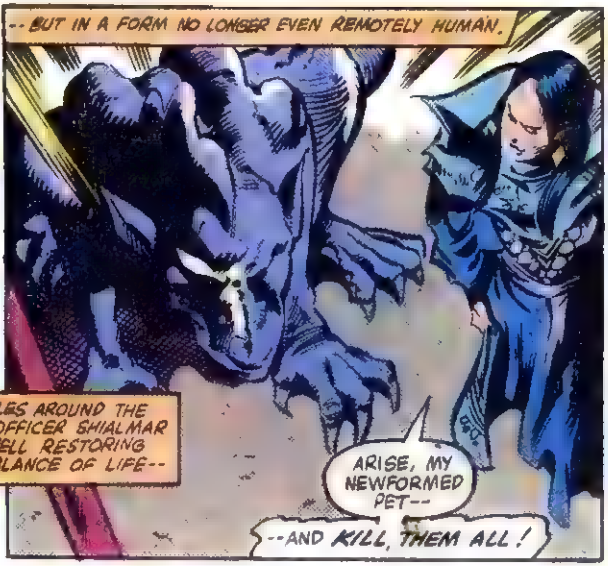

SHE HAD SENT HIM BACK TO CHINA. AND THOUGH HE KEPT THE BLACK MIRROR WITH HIM ALWAYS, THE DIMENSIONAL GATEWAY NEVER AGAIN OPENED.
ONCE MORE, HE BECAME KAN THE PRIEST.
HE--AND ALL THE FIRST-BORN MALES OF OUR LINE EVER SINCE--HAVE INDENTURED OURSELVES TO THOSE MAGES...
UHRRR--!
...WHO SERVED THE FORCES AND POWERS OF GOOD...
...HOPING THEREBY TO ATONE FOR KAN'S TERRIBLE SIN.
...AS MY FATHER, HAMIR THE HERMIT...
...SERVED THE ANCIENT ONE...
...SO DO I SERVE DR. STRANGE.
SO SOMEDAY WILL MY SON SERVE HIM--OR HIS SUCCESSOR.
EH--?!!
IF THAT SON IS NOT YET CONCEIVED, WONG--
--I FEAR HE WILL NEVER BE!
WHO--?!
GHIALMAR!
THE SHADOWQUEEN!
GREETINGS, SILVER FOX, LAST OF MY ANCIENT ENEMIES.
AND GREETINGS TO YOU, STEPHEN STRANGE--AS ONE SORCERER SUPREME TO ANOTHER.

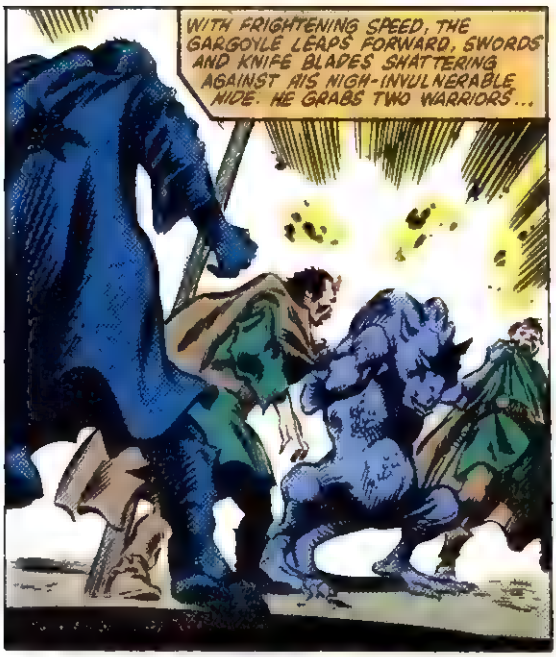

I WOULD LOVE TO CHAT, BUT AS YOU CAN SEE--
--I AM HERE ON BUSINESS!


THE CRYSTALS OF CYNDRIARR!
BACK, SILVER FOX! THEIR TOUCH IS CERTAIN DEATH!
I BARELY FORMED THE SHIELD OF THE SERAPHIM IN TIME TO PARRY HER ATTACK. THE CYNDRIAN CRYSTALS ARE SO POWERFUL-- SO DEADLY-- THAT I HAVE NEVER USED THEM...
...YET SHIALMAR CONJURES THEM WITHOUT EFFORT.

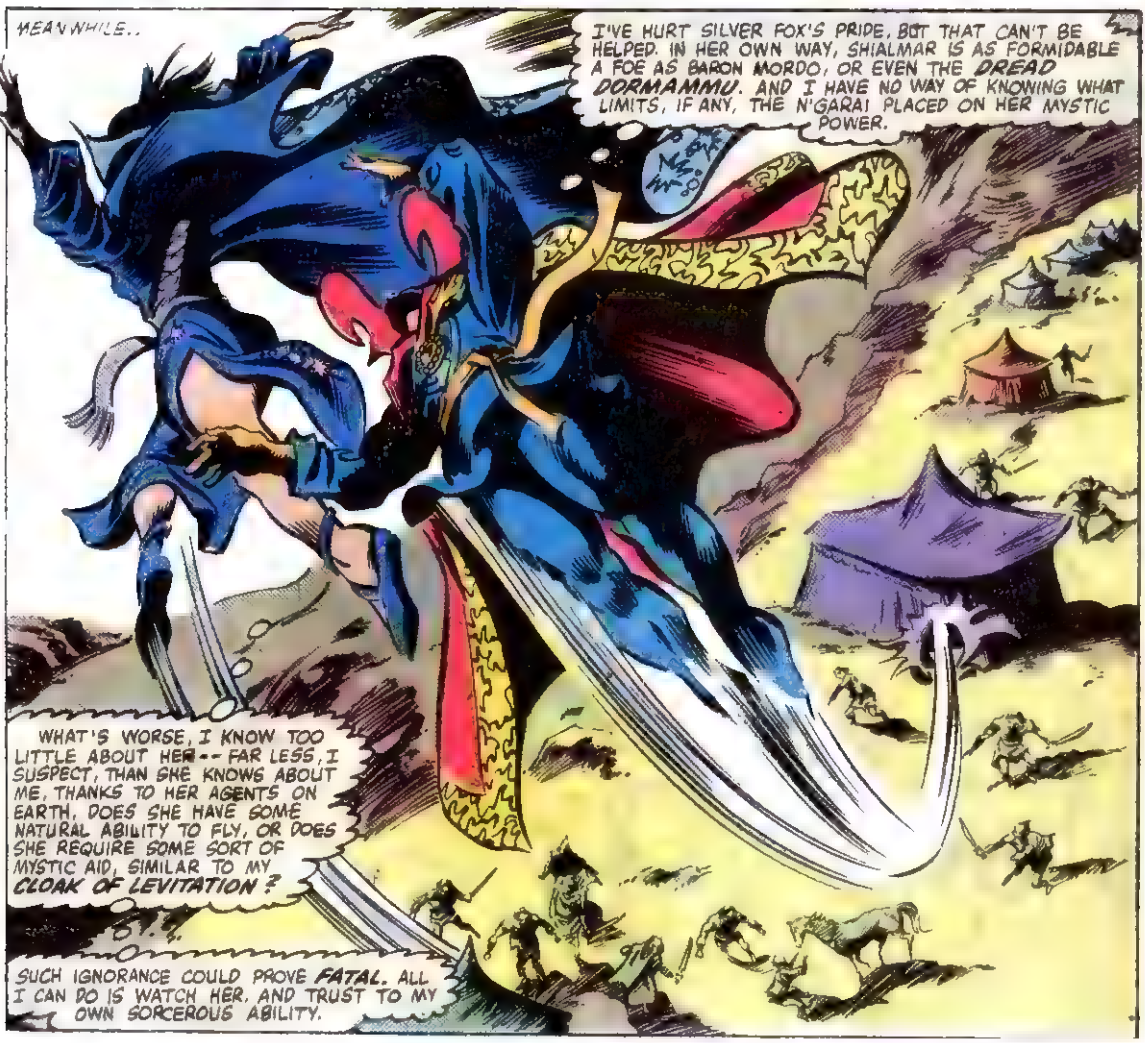
STAY OUT OF THIS, MAGE! THIS IS MY FIGHT!
NO!
THE SHADOWQUEEN IS A VESSEL FOR THE N'GARAI-- ELDER GODS YOU CANNOT HOPE TO DEFEAT ALONE!
I'M NOT EVEN SURE WE CAN DO IT TOGETHER!

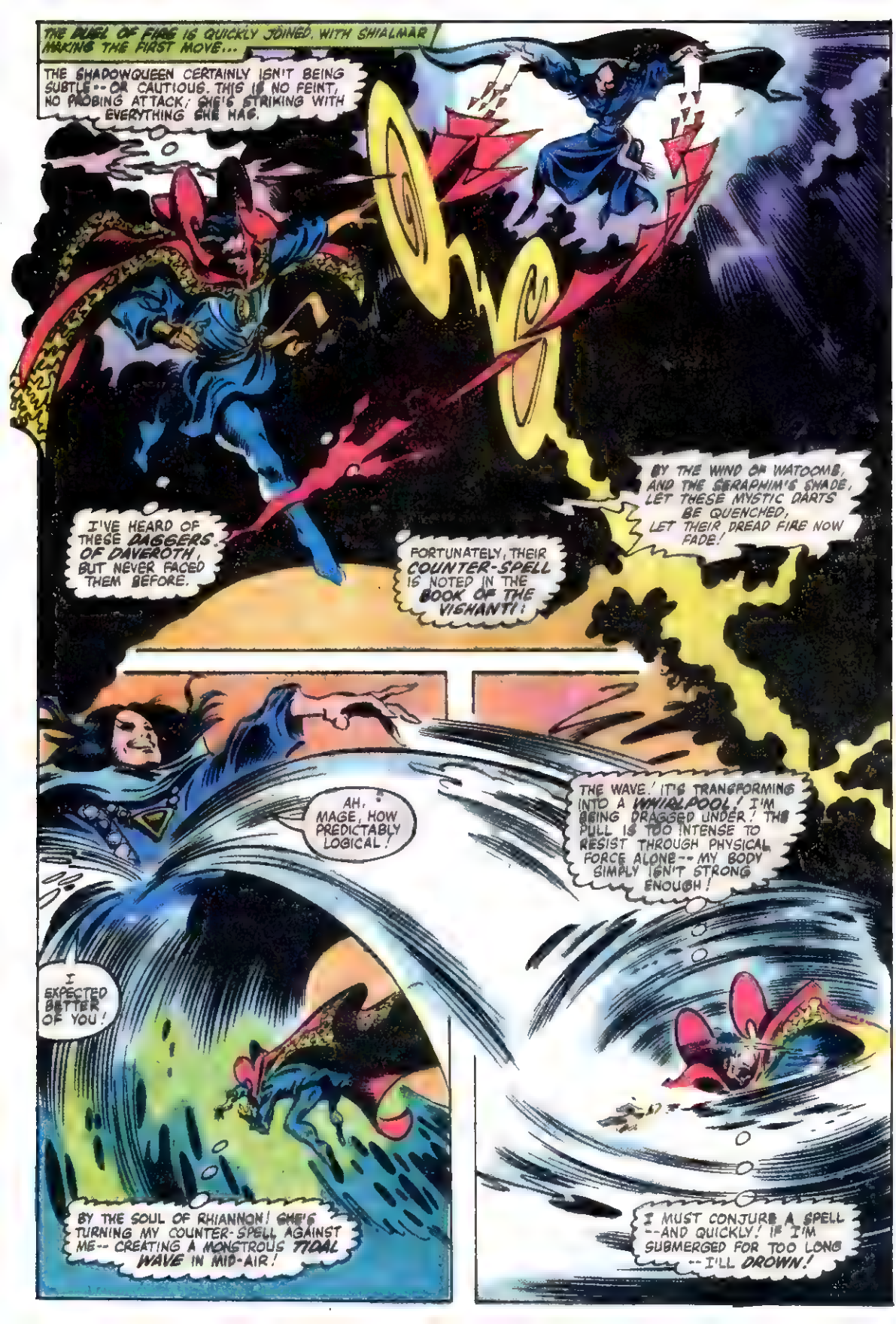

FEAR NOT, SILVER FOX. I'VE A WORTHY OPPONENT FOR YOU.
ENERGY CRACKLES AROUND THE BODY OF THE OFFICER SHIALMAR KILLED, HER SPELL RESTORING HIM TO A SEMBLANCE OF LIFE--


--BUT IN A FORM NO LONGER EVEN REMOTELY HUMAN.
ARISE, MY NEWFORMED PET--
--AND KILL THEM ALL!


WITH FRIGHTENING SPEED, THE GARGOYLE LEAPS FORWARD, SWORDS AND KNIFE BLADES SHATTERING AGAINST HIS NIGH-INVULNERABLE HIDE. HE GRABS TWO WARRIORS...

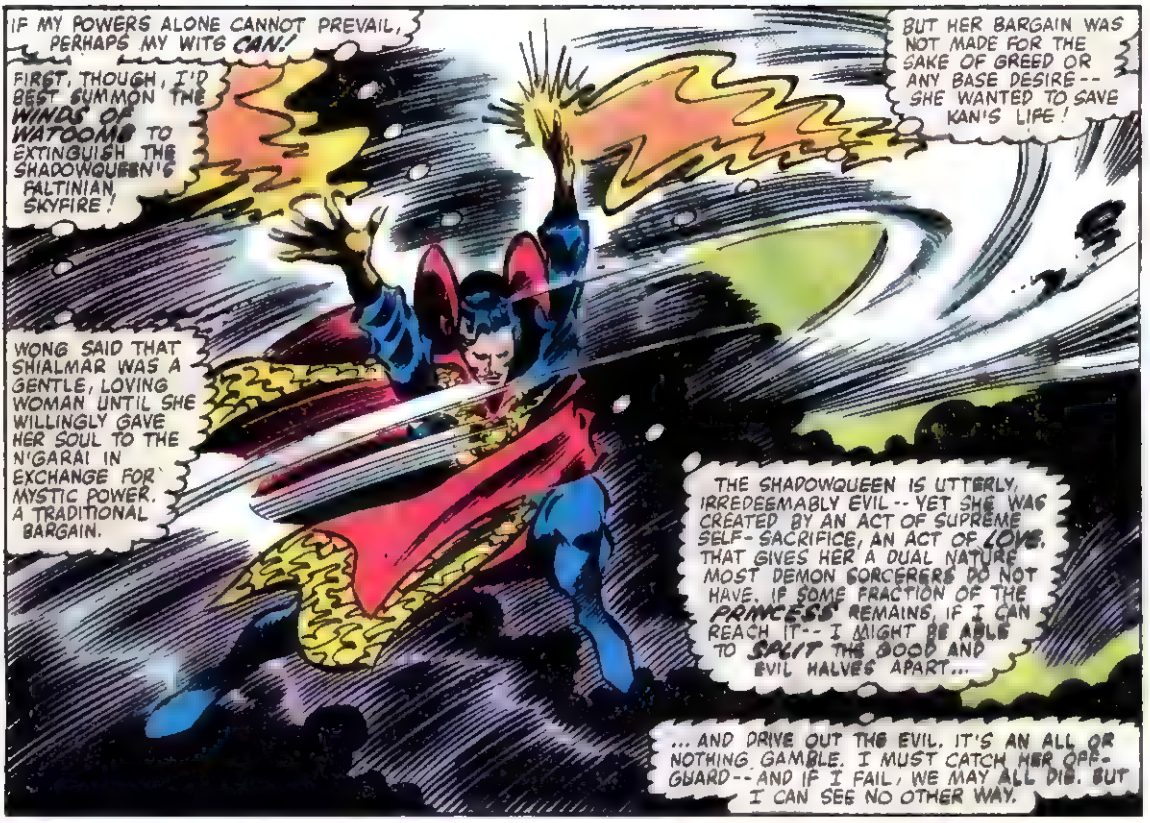
...AND AS HE TOUCHES THEM...
...THEY, TOO, BECOME GARGOYLES!

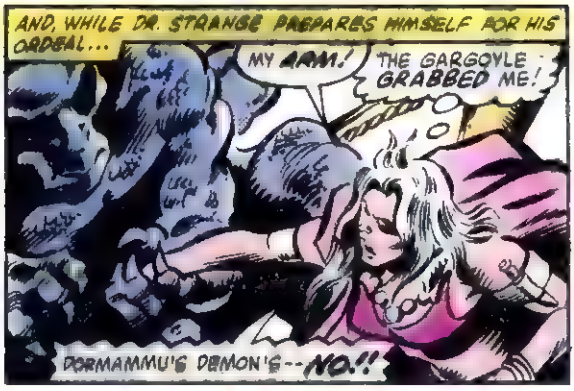

MEANWHILE..
I'VE HURT SILVER FOX'S PRIDE, BUT THAT CAN'T BE HELPED. IN HER OWN WAY, SHIALMAR IS AS FORMIDABLE A FOE AS BARON MORDO, OR EVEN THE DREAD DORMAMMU. AND I HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING WHAT LIMITS, IF ANY, THE N'GARAI PLACED ON HER MYSTIC POWER.
WHAT'S WORSE, I KNOW TOO LITTLE ABOUT HER -- FAR LESS, I SUSPECT, THAN SHE KNOWS ABOUT ME, THANKS TO HER AGENTS ON EARTH. DOES SHE HAVE SOME NATURAL ABILITY TO FLY, OR DOES SHE REQUIRE SOME SORT OF MYSTIC AID, SIMILAR TO MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION?
SUCH IGNORANCE COULD PROVE FATAL. ALL I CAN DO IS WATCH HER, AND TRUST TO MY OWN SORCEROUS ABILITY.

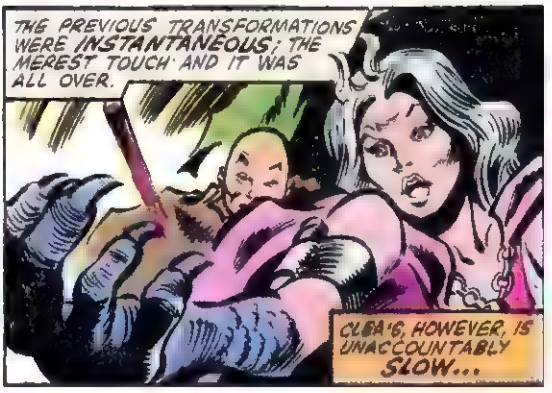

THE DUEL OF FIRE IS QUICKLY JOINED, WITH SHIALMAR MAKING THE FIRST MOVE...
THE SHADOWQUEEN CERTAINLY ISN'T BEING SUBTLE -- OR CAUTIOUS. THIS IS NO FEINT, NO PROBING ATTACK; SHE'S STRIKING WITH EVERYTHING SHE HAS.
I'VE HEARD OF THESE DAGGERS OF DAVEROTH, BUT NEVER FACED THEM BEFORE.
FORTUNATELY, THEIR COUNTER-SPELL IS NOTED IN THE BOOK OF THE VISHANTI!
BY THE WIND OF WATOOMB, AND THE SERAPHIM'S SHADE, LET THESE MYSTIC DARTS BE QUENCHED, LET THEIR DREAD FIRE NOW FADE!
AH, MAGE, HOW PREDICTABLY LOGICAL!
THE WAVE! IT'S TRANSFORMING INTO A WHIRLPOOL! I'M BEING DRAGGED UNDER! THE PULL IS TOO INTENSE TO RESIST THROUGH PHYSICAL FORCE ALONE -- MY BODY SIMPLY ISN'T STRONG ENOUGH!
I EXPECTED BETTER OF YOU!
BY THE SOUL OF RHIANNON! SHE'S TURNING MY COUNTER-SPELL AGAINST ME -- CREATING A MONSTROUS TIDAL WAVE IN MID-AIR!
I MUST CONJURE A SPELL -- AND QUICKLY! IF I'M SUBMERGED FOR TOO LONG -- I'LL DROWN!

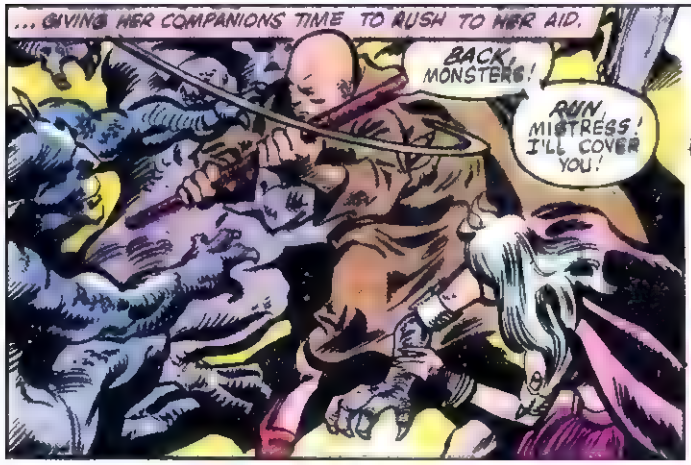
AT THAT MOMENT, DOWN ON THE GROUND...
HOW CAN WE FIGHT THESE CREATURES, MISTRESS CLEA?! THE SLIGHTEST TOUCH INSTANTLY TURNS THEIR VICTIMS INTO GARGOYLES, LOYAL TO THE SHADOWQUEEN!
THIS IMPROVISED BO STAFF OF MINE WON'T KEEP THEM AT BAY MUCH LONGER, AND WHEN THEY'VE SURROUNDED US...
FEAR NOT, HEALER. SHIALMAR WILL NOT DEFEAT US QUITE THAT EASILY.
MY POWERS OF ELEMENTAL MAGIC MAY HAVE NO EFFECT ON THE ENCHANTED STONE FORMS OF THE GARGOYLES...
...BUT I CAN--AND WILL--AFFECT THE EARTH ON WHICH THEY STAND!
EVEN IF I WIN THIS BATTLE, I LOSE--FOR IN THE PROCESS I WILL HAVE BEEN FORCED TO FIGHT, AND PERHAPS...SLAY, MY FRIENDS, WARRIORS AS CLOSE TO ME AS BLOOD-KIN.
THIS IS YOUR DOING, SHADOWQUEEN! I WILL MAKE YOU PAY FOR IT!
BY THE AWESOME NAMELESS RACE, BY THE EVIL I ABHOR--
LET MY FEARSOME FOES NOW FACE--THE RINGS OF RAGGADOR!
THAT TAKES CARE OF TWO MORE. BUT SILVER FOX'S ARMY IS HUGE, AND EACH WARRIOR IN IT IS A POTENTIAL GARGOYLE.
WHATEVER HAPPENS, OUR FATE IS IN STEPHEN'S HANDS.

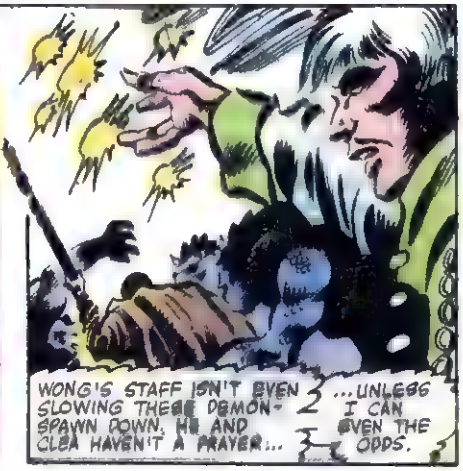
I'M-- FREE!!
THANKS TO MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION!
BELOW ME, CLEA, WONG AND SILVER FOX ARE HARD-PRESSED BUT HOLDING THEIR OWN, FOR THE MOMENT.
AN ADMIRABLE ESCAPE, DR. STRANGE.
LET US SEE IF YOU'LL BE SO FORTUNATE A SECOND TIME!
SHIALMAR! CURSE ME FOR A NOVICE, I LET CONCERN FOR MY COMRADES DISTRACT ME!
SHE'S CONJURING THE FLAMES OF THE FALTINE!
I'M PARRYING EACH ATTACK, THUS FAR-- BUT THAT'S ALL I'M DOING!
SO LONG AS THE SHADOW-QUEEN KEEPS ME ON THE DEFENSIVE LIKE THIS, SHE HAS AN ALMOST UNBEATABLE ADVANTAGE.
IF I MAKE THE SLIGHTEST MISTAKE, IT COULD PROVE FATAL.
SHE CAN STRIKE WITH IMPUNITY-- KNOWING THAT I'LL BE TOO BUSY COUNTERING HER SPELLS TO ATTACK HER!
AT LEAST I HAVE AN ANSWER TO ONE OF MY QUESTIONS: HER POWER IS GREATER THAN MINE. FAR GREATER!
AND SHE HAS NO COMPUNCTION ABOUT KILLING, WHILE I AM BOUND BY OATH TO PRESERVE LIFE WHEREVER POSSIBLE.


IF MY POWERS ALONE CANNOT PREVAIL, PERHAPS MY WITS CAN!
FIRST, THOUGH, I'D BEST SUMMON THE WINDS OF WATOOMB TO EXTINGUISH THE SHADOWQUEEN'S FALTINIAN SKYFIRE!
BUT HER BARGAIN WAS NOT MADE FOR THE SAKE OF GREED OR ANY BASE DESIRE -- SHE WANTED TO SAVE KAN'S LIFE!
WONG SAID THAT SHIALMAR WAS A GENTLE, LOVING WOMAN UNTIL SHE WILLINGLY GAVE HER SOUL TO THE N'GARAI IN EXCHANGE FOR MYSTIC POWER. A TRADITIONAL BARGAIN.
THE SHADOWQUEEN IS UTTERLY, IRREDEEMABLY EVIL -- YET SHE WAS CREATED BY AN ACT OF SUPREME SELF-SACRIFICE, AN ACT OF LOVE, THAT GIVES HER A DUAL NATURE MOST DEMON SORCERERS DO NOT HAVE. IF SOME FRACTION OF THE PRINCESS REMAINS, IF I CAN REACH IT -- I MIGHT BE ABLE TO SPLIT THE GOOD AND EVIL HALVES APART...
... AND DRIVE OUT THE EVIL. IT'S AN ALL OR NOTHING GAMBLE. I MUST CATCH HER OFF-GUARD -- AND IF I FAIL, WE MAY ALL DIE. BUT I CAN SEE NO OTHER WAY.

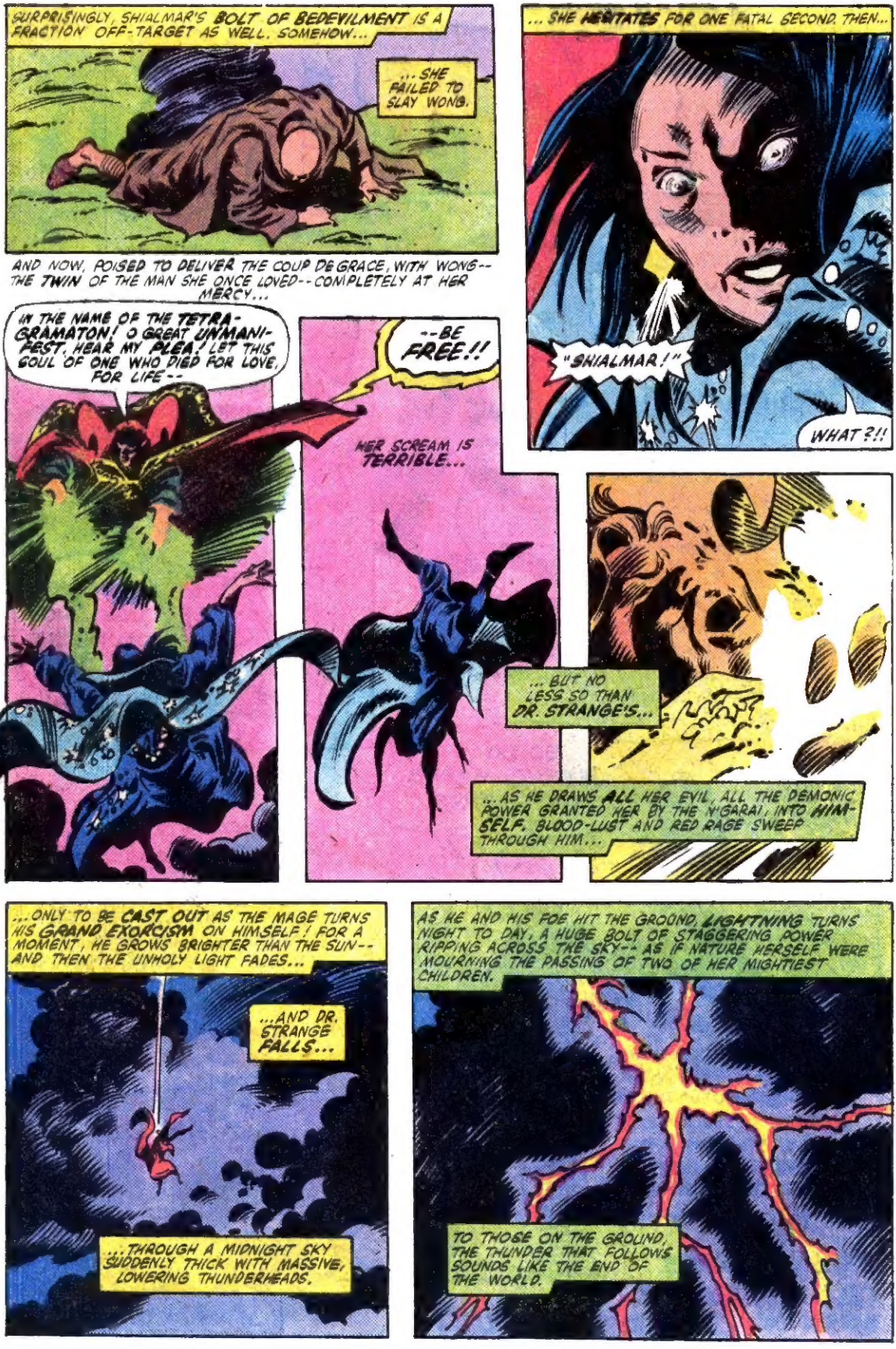

AND, WHILE DR. STRANGE PREPARES HIMSELF FOR HIS ORDEAL...
MY ARM!
THE GARGOYLE GRABBED ME!
DORMAMMU'S DEMON'S -- NO!!

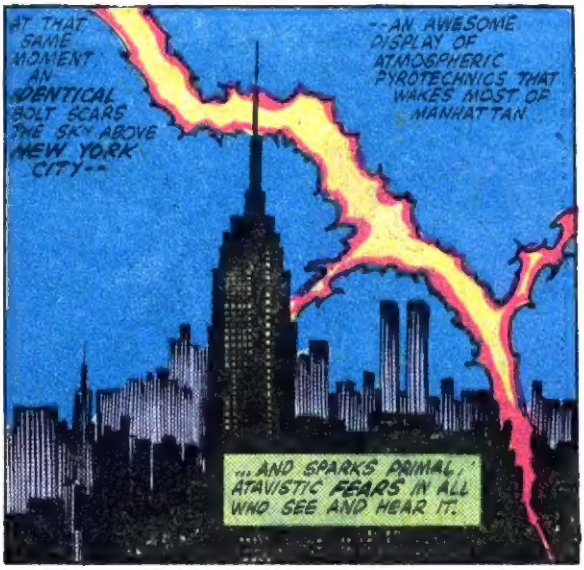

THE PREVIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS WERE INSTANTANEOUS; THE MEREST TOUCH AND IT WAS ALL OVER.
CLEA'S, HOWEVER, IS UNACCOUNTABLY SLOW...

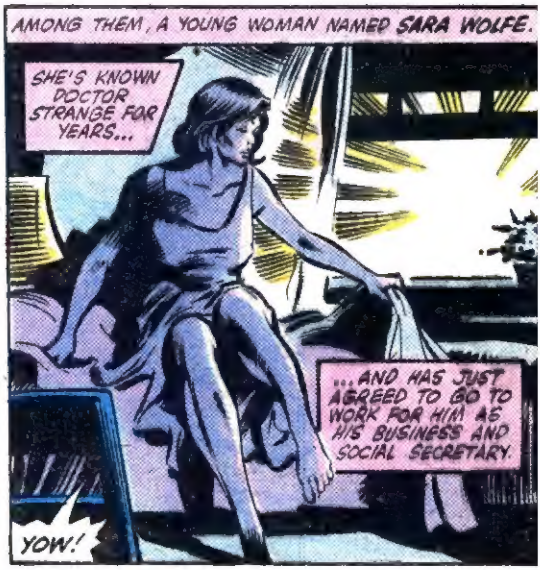

... GIVING HER COMPANIONS TIME TO RUSH TO HER AID.
BACK, MONSTERS!
RUN, MISTRESS! I'LL COVER YOU!

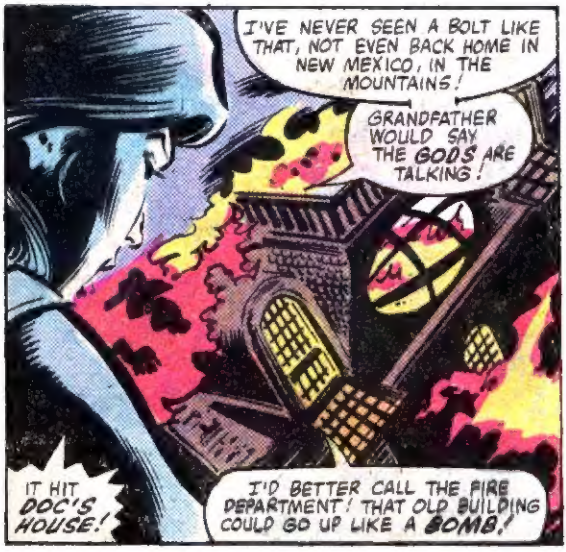

WONG'S STAFF ISN'T EVEN SLOWING THESE DEMON-SPAWN DOWN, HE AND CLEA HAVEN'T A PRAYER...
...UNLESS I CAN EVEN THE ODDS.

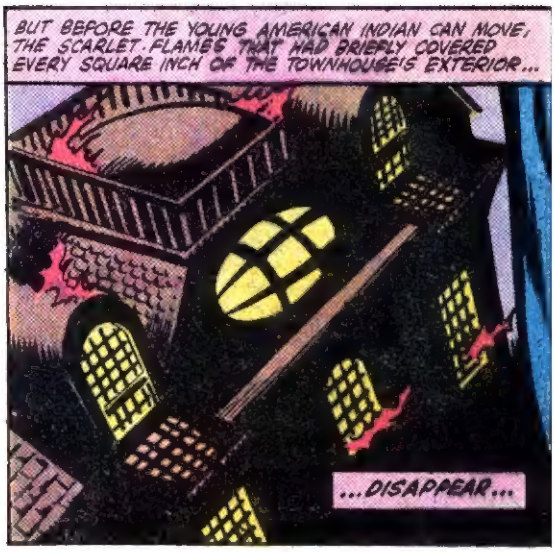
MANIPULATING THE ELEMENTS AS A MASTER SCULPTOR MANIPULATES CLAY, SILVER FOX CREATES AN IRRESISTABLE HURRICANE, WHICH SWEEPS THE GARGOYLES OUT OF THE TENT WHILE LEAVING HIM AND HIS FRIENDS UNTOUCHED.
BLESSED OSHTUR-- MY ARM IS RETURNING TO NORMAL!
BUT HOW?! UNLESS... THE SHADOWQUEEN'S SPELL WAS BLUNTED BY THE FACT THAT, NOT ONLY AM I NOT FROM THIS WORLD, I AM NOT EVEN TRULY HUMAN!
CAUGHT UP IN HER MOMENTARY --JUSTIFIED--EXULTATION; CLEA FAILS TO NOTICE WONG STAGGERING OUTSIDE...
THE GARGOYLE WHICH STRUCK ME ...NEARLY CRACKED MY SKULL...
WHAT?! THE SHADOW-QUEEN-- STRIKING DOWN MY MASTER! SHE'S IGNORING THE BATTLE HERE, SURE THAT NONE OF US CAN HURT HER.
PERHAPS WE CAN'T...
...BUT IN THE NAME OF ALL THOSE WHO SUFFERED BECAUSE OF MY ANCESTOR...
...I MUST TRY!
WONG'S INTENTIONS ARE ADMIRABLE...
...HIS AIM IS NOT.
AN ARROW! WHO-- DARES?!?
YOU!!
AARRRGH!

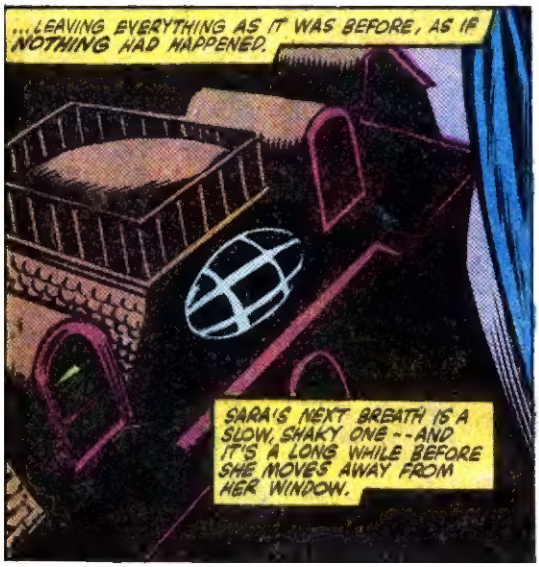

SURPRISINGLY, SHIALMAR'S BOLT OF BEDEVILMENT IS A FRACTION OFF-TARGET AS WELL. SOMEHOW...
...SHE FAILED TO SLAY WONG.
AND NOW, POISED TO DELIVER THE COUP DE GRACE, WITH WONG--THE TWIN OF THE MAN SHE ONCE LOVED--COMPLETELY AT HER MERCY...
IN THE NAME OF THE TETRAGRAMATON! O GREAT UNMANIFEST, HEAR MY PLEA! LET THIS SOUL OF ONE WHO DIED FOR LOVE, FOR LIFE--
--BE FREE!!
HER SCREAM IS TERRIBLE...
...SHE HESITATES FOR ONE FATAL SECOND. THEN...
"SHIALMAR!"
WHAT?!!
...BUT NO LESS SO THAN DR. STRANGE'S...
...AS HE DRAWS ALL HER EVIL, ALL THE DEMONIC POWER GRANTED HER BY THE N'GARAI, INTO HIMSELF. BLOOD-LUST AND RED RAGE SWEEP THROUGH HIM...
...ONLY TO BE CAST OUT AS THE MAGE TURNS HIS GRAND EXORCISM ON HIMSELF! FOR A MOMENT, HE GROWS BRIGHTER THAN THE SUN--AND THEN THE UNHOLY LIGHT FADES...
...AND DR. STRANGE FALLS...
...THROUGH A MIDNIGHT SKY SUDDENLY THICK WITH MASSIVE, LOWERING THUNDERHEADS.
AS HE AND HIS FOE HIT THE GROUND, LIGHTNING TURNS NIGHT TO DAY, A HUGE BOLT OF STAGGERING POWER RIPPING ACROSS THE SKY--AS IF NATURE HERSELF WERE MOURNING THE PASSING OF TWO OF HER MIGHTIEST CHILDREN.
TO THOSE ON THE GROUND, THE THUNDER THAT FOLLOWS SOUNDS LIKE THE END OF THE WORLD.

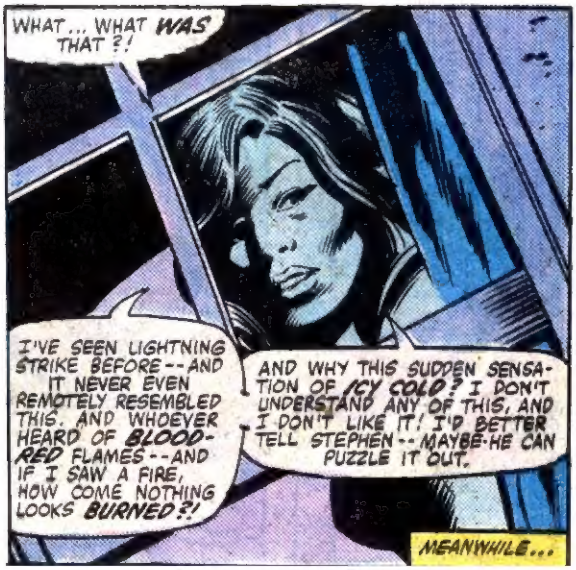

AT THAT SAME MOMENT AN IDENTICAL BOLT SCARS THE SKY ABOVE NEW YORK CITY--
--AN AWESOME DISPLAY OF ATMOSPHERIC PYROTECHNICS THAT WAKES MOST OF MANHATTAN
...AND SPARKS PRIMAL, ATAVISTIC FEARS IN ALL WHO SEE AND HEAR IT.

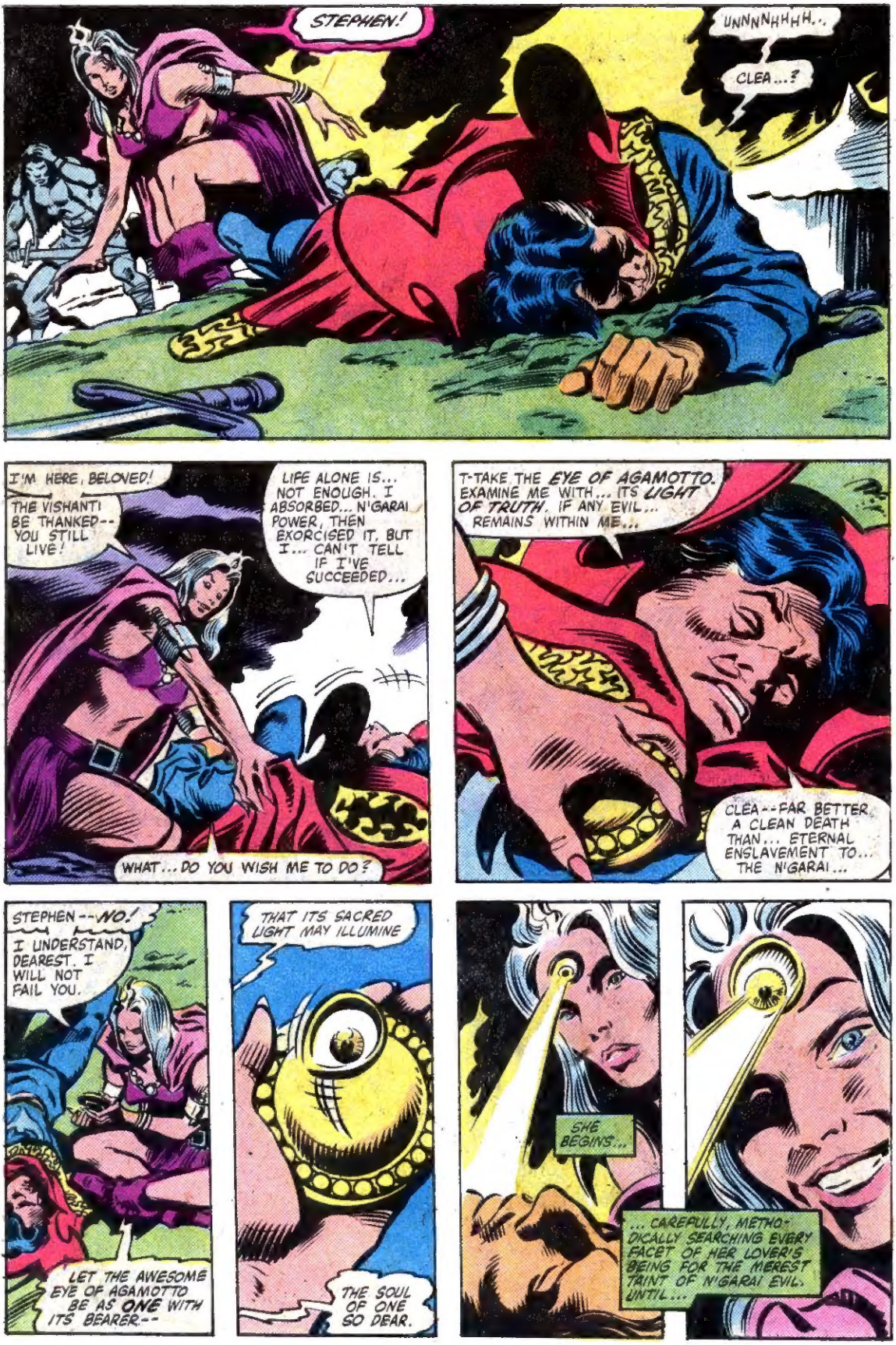

AMONG THEM, A YOUNG WOMAN NAMED SARA WOLFE.
SHE'S KNOWN DOCTOR STRANGE FOR YEARS...
...AND HAS JUST AGREED TO GO TO WORK FOR HIM AS HIS BUSINESS AND SOCIAL SECRETARY.
YOW!

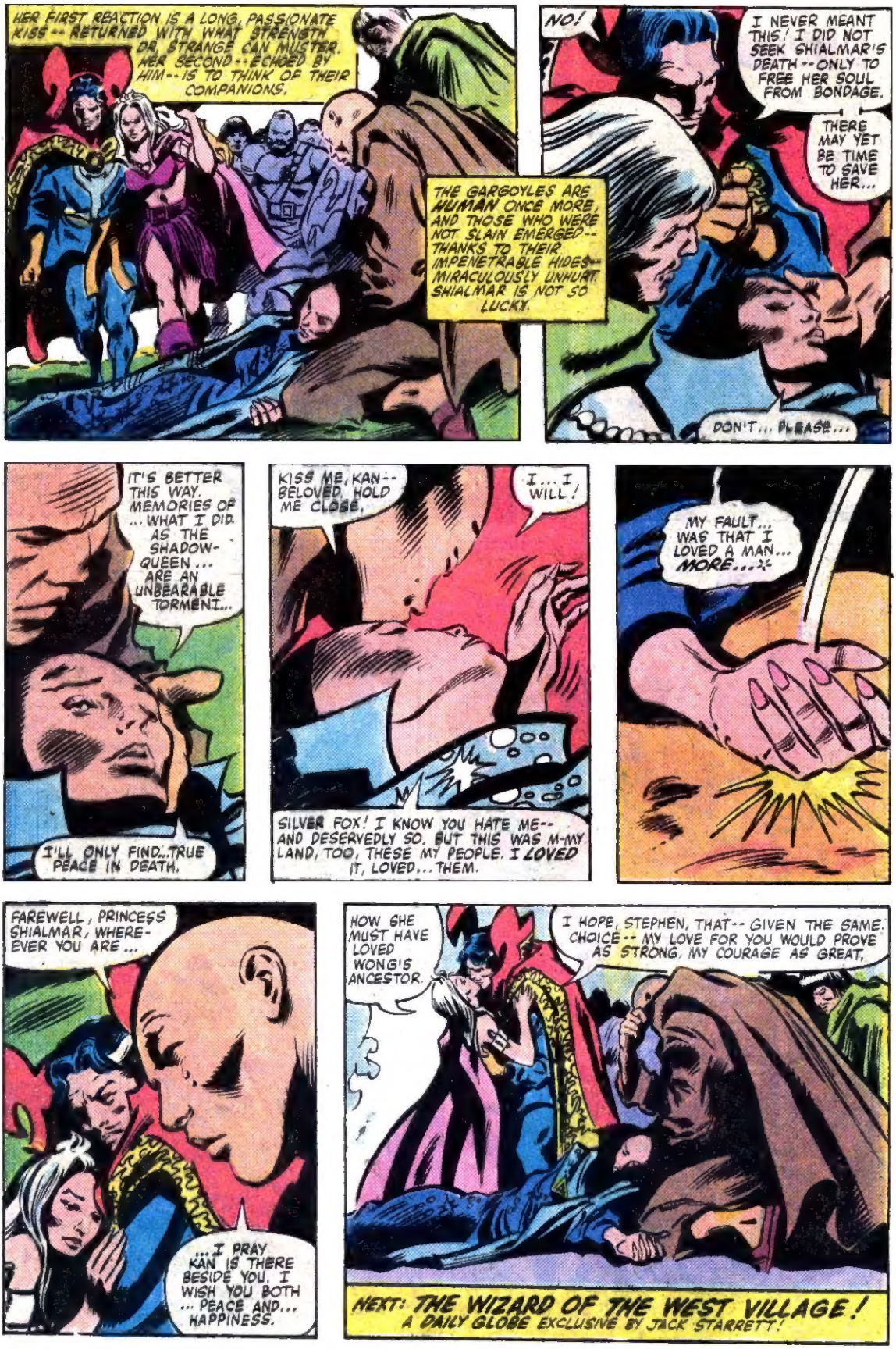

I'VE NEVER SEEN A BOLT LIKE THAT, NOT EVEN BACK HOME IN NEW MEXICO, IN THE MOUNTAINS!
GRANDFATHER WOULD SAY THE GODS ARE TALKING!
IT HIT DOC'S HOUSE!
I'D BETTER CALL THE FIRE DEPARTMENT! THAT OLD BUILDING COULD GO UP LIKE A BOMB!


BUT BEFORE THE YOUNG AMERICAN INDIAN CAN MOVE, THE SCARLET FLAMES THAT HAD BRIEFLY COVERED EVERY SQUARE INCH OF THE TOWNHOUSE'S EXTERIOR...
...DISAPPEAR...


...LEAVING EVERYTHING AS IT WAS BEFORE, AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.
SARA'S NEXT BREATH IS A SLOW, SHAKY ONE--AND IT'S A LONG WHILE BEFORE SHE MOVES AWAY FROM HER WINDOW.


WHAT... WHAT WAS THAT?!
I'VE SEEN LIGHTNING STRIKE BEFORE--AND IT NEVER EVEN REMOTELY RESEMBLED THIS. AND WHOEVER HEARD OF BLOOD-RED FLAMES--AND IF I SAW A FIRE, HOW COME NOTHING LOOKS BURNED?!
AND WHY THIS SUDDEN SENSATION OF ICY COLD? I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS, AND I DON'T LIKE IT! I'D BETTER TELL STEPHEN--MAYBE HE CAN PUZZLE IT OUT.
MEANWHILE...


STEPHEN!
UNNNNHHHH..
CLEA...?
I'M HERE, BELOVED!
THE VISHANTI BE THANKED-- YOU STILL LIVE!
LIFE ALONE IS... NOT ENOUGH. I ABSORBED... N'GARAI POWER, THEN EXORCISED IT, BUT I... CAN'T TELL IF I'VE SUCCEEDED...
WHAT... DO YOU WISH ME TO DO?
T-TAKE THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO. EXAMINE ME WITH... ITS LIGHT OF TRUTH. IF ANY EVIL... REMAINS WITHIN ME...
CLEA--FAR BETTER A CLEAN DEATH THAN... ETERNAL ENSLAVEMENT TO... THE N'GARAI...
STEPHEN--NO!
I UNDERSTAND, DEAREST. I WILL NOT FAIL YOU.
LET THE AWESOME EYE OF AGAMOTTO BE AS ONE WITH ITS BEARER--
THAT ITS SACRED LIGHT MAY ILLUMINE
THE SOUL OF ONE SO DEAR.
SHE BEGINS...
... CAREFULLY, METHODICALLY SEARCHING EVERY FACET OF HER LOVER'S BEING FOR THE MEREST TAINT OF N'GARAI EVIL. UNTIL...


HER FIRST REACTION IS A LONG, PASSIONATE KISS -- RETURNED WITH WHAT STRENGTH DR. STRANGE CAN MUSTER. HER SECOND -- ECHOED BY HIM -- IS TO THINK OF THEIR COMPANIONS.
THE GARGOYLES ARE HUMAN ONCE MORE, AND THOSE WHO WERE NOT SLAIN EMERGED -- THANKS TO THEIR IMPENETRABLE HIDES -- MIRACULOUSLY UNHURT. SHIALMAR IS NOT SO LUCKY.
NO!
I NEVER MEANT THIS! I DID NOT SEEK SHIALMAR'S DEATH -- ONLY TO FREE HER SOUL FROM BONDAGE.
THERE MAY YET BE TIME TO SAVE HER...
DON'T... PLEASE...
IT'S BETTER THIS WAY. MEMORIES OF ... WHAT I DID AS THE SHADOW-QUEEN ... ARE AN UNBEARABLE TORMENT...
I'LL ONLY FIND...TRUE PEACE IN DEATH.
KISS ME, KAN -- BELOVED, HOLD ME CLOSE.
I... I WILL!
SILVER FOX! I KNOW YOU HATE ME -- AND DESERVEDLY SO. BUT THIS WAS M-MY LAND, TOO, THESE MY PEOPLE. I LOVED IT, LOVED... THEM.
MY FAULT... WAS THAT I LOVED A MAN... MORE...
FAREWELL, PRINCESS SHIALMAR, WHEREEVER YOU ARE ...
...I PRAY KAN IS THERE BESIDE YOU. I WISH YOU BOTH ... PEACE AND... HAPPINESS.
HOW SHE MUST HAVE LOVED WONG'S ANCESTOR.
I HOPE, STEPHEN, THAT -- GIVEN THE SAME CHOICE -- MY LOVE FOR YOU WOULD PROVE AS STRONG, MY COURAGE AS GREAT.
NEXT: THE WIZARD OF THE WEST VILLAGE!
A DAILY GLOBE EXCLUSIVE BY JACK STARRETT!